

VZCZCXRO9726
PP RUEHBI RUEHPW
DE RUEHLM #0552/01 1410806
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 210806Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0017
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1690
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 8698
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 6932
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3064
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9321
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 2484
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6627
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 0355

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000552

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INSB AND OES PATRICK HUDAK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/20/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [EENV](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: MALDIVES: AMBASSADOR PUSHES FOR CONSOLIDATION OF
DEMOCRATIC GAINS

REF: A. COLOMBO 531

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 489

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires James R. Moore Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In farewell calls on President Nasheed, Vice President Waheed, and Foreign Minister Shaheed, Ambassador warned of growing political and ideological polarization in Maldives and encouraged the government to work closely within its coalition and with opposition parties to continue and further the country's democratic transition. He pushed the GORM to appoint qualified members to independent institutions, such as the Human Rights Commission, the Elections Commission, and the Judiciary, and to ensure that these and other government institutions have the ability to operate without untoward political interference. Meanwhile, opposition and coalition members warned that President Nasheed is engaging in inappropriate and unconstitutional behavior; FM Shaheed bluntly stated that Nasheed will be impeached in the coming months. President Nasheed and others praised Ambassador for his close and frank cooperation with Maldives, particularly his efforts to assist the reform process throughout the past two and a half years. End summary.

Farewell, Mr. President!

[1](#)2. (C) Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed ("Anni") praised Ambassador for his cooperation with Maldives throughout his tenure as Ambassador, in particular his support for the reform process and the country's recent transition to democracy. He stated that he was rather pleased with the recent parliamentary results (ref A), even if his Maldives Democratic Party (MDP) was unable to gain the entire thirty seats it targeted. "The important thing," he said, "was obtaining 26 seats so that the government is safe." By safe, the President meant that opposition party would be unable to impeach him. He nevertheless underscored the importance of maintaining the coalition, even though some of the Ministers will likely change due to the shift in the power balance in the Parliament.

[1](#)3. (C) Nasheed asked the Ambassador for advice and suggestions as the government moves forward, noting that he is "undoubtedly making some mistakes, albeit unintentionally." The Ambassador underscored the need, for the long-term stability of recent democratic gains, for the President to work closely with both his coalition and the opposition. Ambassador stated that some firmly believe that Maldives is becoming more polarized, both politically and ideologically. To counter this, the President should take sincere steps to engage meaningfully with others.

[1](#)4. (C) Ambassador also encouraged the GORM to appoint qualified individuals to the independent institutions that many fought so hard for, including the Human Rights Commission, the Elections Commission, and the Judiciary. Highlighting the May 16 establishment of a presidential commission to investigate allegations of corruption against officials of the former government, the Ambassador noted that existing institutions could likely address these allegations without alienating the opposition. Nasheed waved off the Ambassador's concern, outlining that the new commission is meant to assist those institutions merely through the collection and sharing of data, not take action on its own. Ambassador underscored that public perception does matter, and that if such actions are seen as partisan, they can be harmful to the government's ability to deepen the democratic gains it has accomplished. The goal should be greater inclusion of various parties in the political dialogue, not polarization.

Climate Change

[1](#)5. (SBU) Noting both the U.S. and GORM governments' commitment to climate change, the Ambassador encouraged closer bilateral cooperation on this issue. Nasheed agreed. Looking ahead to the next round of climate change

negotiations in Copenhagen in 2010, Nasheed said that a follow-on Kyoto Protocol document should be more proactive.

COLOMBO 00000552 002 OF 003

Rather than being a list of things that countries should not do, it should tell countries what they should do; for example, it could tell countries to build renewable energy plants vice coal power plants. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. has significant new and emerging green technology available that could likely assist Maldives in its efforts to become the world's first carbon-neutral country.

16. (SBU) In a subsequent meeting with Vice President Waheed, the Ambassador congratulated Waheed as being chosen to spearhead the President's Advisory Council Climate Change. Waheed noted that his first goal is to clarify the GORM's position, which will deal heavily with issues surrounding adaptation. He is at present immersing himself in various technology solutions, such as concentrated solar power, that will aid Maldives. He also noted that the GORM is at present working with Japan, which has sponsored a rural-electrication project on a small island.

Discontent with Nasheed

17. (C) Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP) member (and Former Foreign Minister) Abdulla Shahid and DRP MP (and power broker) Thasmeen Ali outlined for Ambassador their view that the May 9 parliamentary elections were a straightforward statement by the public that the expectations aroused by Nasheed have not been met. More importantly, Shahid said that Nasheed acted inappropriately and unconstitutionally during the election, causing disgust among voters. Shahid alleged that the use of state resources by Nasheed to promote his fellow candidates, as well as the denial of equal access to state media for other parties, were just two of numerous serious errors in judgment on the President's part. Intimidation of civil servants was another. Ali stated that Nasheed is now guilty of actions the MDP frequently criticized the former government of taking. "He may state democratic principles, but he does not promote them," Ali commented.

18. (C) Shahid said many Maldivians now view Nasheed as "too dictatorial." This was echoed by current Foreign Minister Ahmed Shaheed, who stated that parts of Nasheed's government "are crossing lines that Gayoom did not cross." He warned that while the government should see itself as a caretaker helping to transition itself to a better democracy, many instead appear to want to establish a foundation for a new thirty-year dictatorship under Nasheed. Speaking frankly, he stated that the government was "devastated" by its poor performance in the parliamentary election, but relieved that it received the necessary 26 seats to block impeachment. However, Shaheed predicted frankly that one individual would leave the MDP, and that the President would be impeached for his actions at some point this year. Shaheed explained that if an impeachment takes place, the President must immediately resign. The Vice President takes control, and new elections must take place within six months.

19. (C) Shaheed noted that many within the government and Shaheed's own party, Dhivehi Qaumeey Party (DQP), are frustrated because the government refuses to take advice from others or to consider taking a middle path. Shaheed stated that establishing the rule of law should be the government's top priority, but it seems the government is too interested in politicking to focus on its pressing legislative agenda - a task that will now be more difficult with DRP control of Parliament. Salah Shihab, fellow DQP member, told Ambassador that many people voted for former President Gayoom's DRP party as they felt it was the only party powerful enough to check Nasheed's rising ambitions.

IMF: FM expects request in 2009

10. (C) Maldives remains in serious financial straits. Revised budget expenditures are expected to be 67% of GDP (ref B) in 2009. Tourist arrivals are down by a less-than-expected 10-15%, but various sources report tourists are spending considerably fewer dollars in country than normal. A black market for U.S. dollars, which is pegged at 12.8 Maldivian rufiyaa against the U.S. dollar, has emerged. FM Shaheed stated that despite a concessional loan

COLOMBO 00000552 003 OF 003

of \$100 million from India in late 2008, the government will need to request IMF assistance this year to avert failure. He commented that the President is loathe to do so because he is wary that IMF conditions will result in a need to get rid of many political appointees to cut government expenditures.

Comment

11. (C) We find some of the rhetoric about Nasheed's and the MDP's "dictatorial tendencies" overblown. Maldives has made considerable progress in democratization in the last two years. The outcomes of the two elections - presidential and parliamentary - should speak for themselves; each was won by

the opposition at the time, although the ruling party and the opposition had changed roles. Maldivians have now firmly established the principle that they can and will change their government at the ballot box. Still, there can be no denying that Nasheed and the MDP botched what should have been a relatively easy interregnum between the two elections by trying too hard to set themselves up as the new natural party of government. They have now paid the price for their attempt at political hegemony. Concerns about Anni's ability to lead his country to a successful completion of its democratic reform process are strong and growing; it will now be interesting to see whether the MDP can manage the disappointment generated by its unexpectedly clear election loss. Embassy believes that a period of "cohabitation" between the MDP-led government and the Parliament's opposition majority could actually help to consolidate the principle of pluralism in Maldives - but only if both parties can demonstrate greater political maturity. It is up to them to make this work; a failure to cooperate would be a major setback for Maldives' so-far successful experiment in democracy.

MOORE